Christians in Solidarity With East Timor Newsletter

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This newsheet is printed not only for CISET members, but for all those interested in the cause of the East Timorese people. It hopes to provide an overview on what is happening both in East Timor and in other areas of the world.

MAY 1ST MEETING - TIMOR: WHAT WE CAN DO.

(The following is an exceppt from the introductory address given by Pat Walsh at the May 1 meeting publicised in the last edition of this newsletter. Immediately following is the list of suggestions for action on which the meeting decided and suggested. A fuller list of possible action and resources, including the address list of delegates to the A.L.P. conference and the fuller text of the letter handed to the Pope, are available from CISET on (03) 419-5588 or P.O. Box92, North Fitzroy, 3068.)

The situation in East Timor is far from normal or acceptable. The Indonesian Bishops are obviously acutely appalled at the magnitude of the suffering there. Their letter is addressed especially to those who are suffering, and being deluged with the most bitter trials both physically and spiritually. Any help given has been "but a drop of water compared to the ocean of pain suffered by our brothers and sisters."

The Church in East Timor was initially slow in acting. Mgr Lopes told us last year that 6 years elapsed before he made his first public protest at human rights abuses. Generally speaking, the experience of oppression has dynamised the Church and transformed it into a Church of the people. Some signs of that change can be seen in some recent events. The clergy of East Timor last Christmas refused to attend a party which General B. Murdani, the head of the Indonesian armed forces, had invited them to. During the recent visit by the head of the Indonesian Bishops conference, the seminarians told him of the true nature of Timor today.- the constant harrassment of priests and people in the outlying areas even to the extent of house searchings; the accusations of being pro-Fretilin. The church in Timor has emerged from its past anonymity as a colonial entity to a force both within Timor and internationally of some note.

This has drawn a response from other areas of the Church. The letter by the Indonesian bishops is just one example, significant as it is. Other examples include: the Portugese bishops calling on their govt., the Indonesian govt and appropriate international bodies to do more to resolve the issue; Pax Christi and IMCA, two international Catholic bodies testified before the UN Human Rights Commission in February; The Dutch Comission for Justice and Peace is preparing a statement on the issue. The Victorian Anglican Synod has passed a resolution in support of self-determination for East Timor;

One could continue. We must take heart from the momentum which the Church in Timor has stimulated, despite formidable obstacles. We can do likewise. If the Church in East Timor is trying to adapt itself more deeply to the true situation there, we must as Australian Christians formulate an Australian response relevant to our situation.

Our greatest threat is the danger that the ALP Conference in July will either completely drop its long standing support for Timor or adopt a meaningless compromise. It is not at all "inconceivable" as Bill Hayden said in 1978 "that the Australian people would allow the Govtt to recognise the seizure of Timor." If this is true the question we must answer is what we can do to halt this corruption and betrayal.

The meeting put forward several suggestions for action:

1. Encourage as many people as possible to attend a public meeting being held on July 1st at Central Hall, Brunswick St, Fitzroy at 2p.m.

2. Influence Church people/leaders to make public statements in support of present ALP policy on East Timor through:

A. Personal Contact- visit or phone local clergy of any denomination; through friends, workmates, groups we belong to; Bishops; attend meeting with 5 other friends.

B. Letter Writing - to local and Church newsletters/papers; media; religious orders; to ALP conference delegates stressing that as church people concerned with human rights we are concerned (and also vote).

C. Lobbying- through networks, radio, key meetings, leaflets, petition, prayers in parishes, guest speakers, information days.

D. Other- the possibilities are there: the resources are available: imagination and creativity and action will help and are necessary: the simple ideas are often the most fruitful.

POPE IN PNG

Today, the 8th of May the Pope was handed a letter by the Pro-Nuncio in Port Moresby. A quick quote " Your Holiness, We, as Timorese, write on behalf of our suffering compatriots. We know from other visits and speeches by your Holiness that those who suffer are of special concern to you, as they were to Jesus Christ himself. Our suffering these last 9 years will not diminish. The war will go on. We have lost faith in govts. The rights and aspirations of small peoples are of little interest to them. We reject their secular solutions founded as they are of pragmatic self interest, without concern for Christian values of peace and justice, without consultation, without the welfare of the people being considered. We take heart from recent statements of concern by the Church. We believe that if your Holiness were to add his influence to theirs the search for peace would be advanced. It is not for us to say what your role should be. We do ask that while you are so near you will remember the East Timorese in your prayers. We pray that God will bless your mission.

PARKVILLE

CISET MEETING: TUESDAY, MAY 29. 7:30p.m. Asian Bureau Australia, 173 Royal Pde,